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KT photo | **Tim Bath**

House of Burgess: Clinton, Trump's health questions

Their policies, not prescriptions, should be our focus

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

Rumors regarding possible serious health issues afflicting Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton spilled into headlines Sept. 11.

Clinton was filmed by Zdenek Gazda hastily leaving a memorial service in New York City commemorating the 15th anniversary of 9/11. In the video, Clinton is seen nearly losing consciousness while being escorted to her

waiting vehicle. Later, her campaign announced she was fighting pneumonia.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has endured his own health saga as a single-page letter written Dec. 3, 2015, by Dr. Harold Bornstein, a gastroenterologist, has come under increased scrutiny.

“Trump’s personal physician said he wrote a letter declaring Trump would be the healthiest president in history in just five minutes while a limo sent by the candidate waited outside his Manhattan office,” reported NBC News’ Anna R. Schechter, Chris Francescani and Tracy Connor Aug. 26.

This glowing assessment seems more than a little suspect given the garbage food Trump is often photographed eating, combined with his complete lack of exercise. Trump appeared Thursday alongside Dr. Mehmet Oz on “The Dr. Oz Show,” with another Bornstein letter in hand; this one written Sept. 13 declaring him in “excellent health.”

“When I’m speaking in front of 15 and 20,000 people and I’m up there using a lot of motion, I guess in it’s own way, it’s a pretty healthy act,” Trump said. “A lot of times these rooms are very hot, like saunas, and I guess that is a form of exercise and, you know?”

Hillary Clinton is 68. Trump is 70. Neither strikes me as particularly physically healthy — and I truly don’t care.

Have you ever seen those side-by-side, before-and-after illustrations that show photos of presidents when they are first elected and when they leave office? The office is a grind, taking a toll on even the strongest politicians.

We, as a country, should operate as if the president could die at any moment. It's why the Secret Service protects the candidates and the president. It's why a designated survivor from the president's Cabinet is chosen to be sequestered at a secret location during the State of the Union address. Because of that same order of succession, it's why we care so much who the vice president is. Since the ratification of the 25th Amendment in 1967, Reagan (once) and George W. Bush (twice) temporarily named vice presidents George H.W. Bush and Dick Cheney, respectively, as acting president while undergoing colon procedures.

A total of 43 men have held the office of president. (Grover Cleveland served twice.) Four — Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley and John F. Kennedy — were assassinated. Four others — William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Warren G. Harding and Franklin D. Roosevelt — also died in office. Thirteen more — Andrew Jackson, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Harry S. Truman, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama — were under credible threat of assassination.

I am far more concerned about what policies these candidates and their running mates would implement while they are still alive than I am about wringing my hands wondering whether they might perish. What was in the thousands of deleted emails recovered by the FBI from when Hillary Clinton was secretary of state? What's in Trump's tax returns? Where are the transcripts of the high-paying speeches Hillary Clinton delivered to Wall Street banks? Where is any evidence of Trump's much-touted recent personal charitable donations?

I would like to know the answers to those questions before we even begin talking about these two's body mass indexes.

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